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SUBJECT: BOTSWANA ASSESSES POST-ELECTION ZIMBABWE

11. (U) Summary: During a meeting between AF/S Director Dan Mozena and Botswana's MFA PermSec Mpofu on April 7, the latter was frank in airing the frustration the GOB feels regarding Zimbabwe. The deterioration of trade and the dislocations border jumpers cause for Botswana are two major problems. Albeit reluctantly, GOB continues to allow VOA's transmission via medium-wave of broadcasts into Zimbabwe. Impatience with Zimbabwe's political and economic crises was the tone of the discussion. End summary.

12. (U) AF/S Director Dan Mozena met with GOB's MFA Permanent Secretary, Ernest Mpofu, on April 7, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Also attending: Lois Aroian, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Gaborone, Julian Mokgathle, MFA, Americas and Europe Desk. Pol/Econ chief took notes.

The Zimbabwe Election

13. (U) The meeting opened with mutual pleasantries, and talk of regional rain, which led into talk of regional food security. Without prompting, PermSec Mpofu stated that food was used as a political weapon in Zimbabwe. The recently held Zimbabwe elections then came under review. DCM noted that election observers from the region should have gone to Zimbabwe earlier than they did and alluded to U.S. Embassy Harare's deploying at least 35 observers, who witnessed election irregularities and concluded that there was in fact massive rigging. PermSec Mpofu responded by saying that the world now needed to hear from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). "It is a pity the MDC didn't get its act together," he said. He stated that SADC (Southern African Development Community) had delayed its own pronouncement on the election-it had waited a day -- in order to give the MDC a chance to produce evidence of election rigging, but such evidence had not then been forthcoming. It was only now-a week later -- that the MDC alleged irregularities happening in at least 36 constituencies, and that the voters tallied were not consonant with the announced result. Director Mozena agreed: the MDC should have done this immediately, and should have done a parallel vote count.

Troublesome Neighbor

14. (SBU)PermSec Mpofu continued: he did not blame the MDC-it was not able to mobilize quickly. "In any case," he continued, "an election is only part of the picture. What I said to the Zimbabwe ambassador was, 'You are obviously very excited about the election; you are happy-but what is your way forward?'" Mpofu said that it was very difficult for Botswana, as neighboring country, to continue as if nothing has changed. He would like to discuss relations between the two countries at some length with the Zimbabwean ambassador, but there was no responsiveness. Mozena asked what the Zimbabwean ambassador had said to that, and Mpofu said there had been no response whatsoever. He chuckled, and said, "Don't tell Washington, since if word got back to Zimbabwe, we would once again be accused of being on the side of the Americans- but we have our problems with Zimbabwe." Mpofu said of Zimbabwe, "It is a burden we have to bear." The Botswana people are becoming very hostile to Zimbabweans, and that is not a desirable situation."

15. (SBU) Mpofu elaborated. Foremost is the fact that bilateral trade has gone down in the last few years. Whereas up to five years ago, 33 percent of Botswana's external trade was with Zimbabwe, that is now less than an estimated 2 percent - mostly imports, according to Mpofu. In the past, Selebi-Phikwe and Francistown, as Botswana's manufacturing hubs, depended on Zimbabwe as their primary market outlet. That has vanished. Bulawayo used to be the industrial center of Zimbabwe. Manufacturing enterprises often had dual factory locations--one in Francistown, and one in Bulawayo, where a division of labor in the manufacturing

processes, especially in textiles, was shared. Goods made with 25 percent local input were considered domestic. The more sophisticated products would go back to Zimbabwe for finishing. This arrangement benefited both Zimbabwe and Botswana. That has now changed drastically. Factories have closed on both sides of the border, increasing unemployment in Botswana, and Bulawayo, according to Mpofu, is a 'ghost town'.

16. (SBU) Mpofu then described the adverse effect of the Beitbridge railway line on Botswana Railways since 2000. Goods that transit Zimbabwe from RSA to Botswana are now considered subject to duties. Mpofu said, "Well, we don't think this is only Zimbabwe's doing; we suspect RSA is colluding; they want to kill Botswana Railways and take it over." He said that GOB had several times discussed the tardiness of delivery of goods and the inefficiencies of the Beitbridge railway with Zimbabwe: "We thought they understood- but nothing happened."

----- The Border Fence -----

17. (SBU) Mozena asked about the construction of the border fence between Botswana and Zimbabwe. Mpofu embarked on a lengthy explanation. In the past, he said, animals that came over the border were destroyed. That was no solution; people also bring in meat, and this has the potential to carry animal disease. Furthermore, elephants, which can be vectors of livestock diseases, rarely were deterred by a fence, nor were kudu, which can also be affected by foot and mouth disease. "So Botswana decided to build a stronger fence- electrified." Foot and mouth disease is endemic in Zimbabwe and the country does not have the resources to combat it. Botswana had offered to send vaccine, but with no success, at least not until the situation got desperate. "Zimbabweans are not easy," said Mpofu.

18. (SBU) Mozena asked what effect the electrified fence would have on the migration of people. Mpofu said that the electrified fence will be perceived as being erected primarily as a deterrent to people migration, although that was not the case. He cited the increased number of border crossing points, so that persons intent on legally entering Botswana from Zimbabwe would not have to walk far. But the majority of Zimbabweans cross illegally, and are here. Mpofu suggested that Mozena have a look around Kaunda Road, one of Gaborone's major thoroughfares, where illegal Zimbabweans sit along the sidewalks, hoping to be selected for odd jobs and piecework. He said they were everywhere: a friend of his, on the road to Shakawe in the extreme northwest of the country, was accosted by Zimbabweans begging for work: "In remote cattleposts, you will find English-speaking Zimbabweans."

19. (SBU) Mozena asked what Botswana think of this state of affairs. Mpofu said, "People are becoming hostile." All crime is attributed to Zimbabweans. Mpofu said, "I come from the northeast of the country, where people are ethnically the same as across the border-Kalanga, Ndebele. We used to travel back and forth, and help each other during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. But even there now, people are very hostile. They are the first victims of crimes committed by desperate Zimbabweans who have no money, no food -- nothing."

10. (SBU) Mozena asked what could be done. Mpofu responded by saying that Zimbabwe's situation is a problem for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He recited what he had asked the Zimbabwean ambassador: what is the way forward? Mpofu stated that he had advised the Zimbabwean ambassador to normalize relations with the West, and with the rest of the world. To rehabilitate the Zimbabwean economy, funding from western sources, the World Bank, and even from the African Development Bank would be needed, and that implied Zimbabwe would have to take a different international stance. When Mozena asked about his reaction, Mpofu said, with little attempt at disguising his bemusement, "The Zimbabwean ambassador is not very sophisticated."

----- VOA Broadcasts -----

11. (SBU) Mozena thanked Mpofu for Botswana's allowing the VOA transmitter in Selebi-Phikwe to broadcast programs into Zimbabwe. "And the people of Zimbabwe thank you, also," he said, "as it is often their only source of news. Almost everyone listens to the

programs." Mpofu responded by saying there was a lot of pressure on Botswana; Zimbabwe views Botswana as being engaged in a conspiracy. Mpofu made a pitch once again for shortwave, rather than medium-wave broadcasts. He disagreed when Mozena pointed out medium-wave broadcasts were more accessible to Zimbabweans.

Perennial Problem: Zimbabwe

¶12. (SBU) Mpofu turned philosophical, and reflective. He stated that he would retire next year. He recalled that when he started in the foreign ministry in 1975, Zimbabwe was the issue; the only place the region could meet to discuss it was Lusaka. Thirty years later, he said, "I'm still dealing with Zimbabwe. What contribution has Zimbabwe made to the region? Nothing."

¶13. (SBU) Comment: Perhaps because he is soon going into retirement, PermSec Mpofu was extremely forthright in his comments on Botswana's neighboring country, Zimbabwe. Mpofu, a Kalanga-speaker whose parents came to Botswana from then-Southern Rhodesia, decades ago, clearly has strong feelings about events in Zimbabwe, and frankly expressed them to a sympathetic interlocutor like Mozena. Nonetheless, Botswana's government is unlikely to progress from frustration to a plan of action on addressing its neighbor's crisis. End comment.
HUGGINS